5/21/61

THE COURAGE OF FACING TRUTH

1 Cor 3:18-23

It was THE YEAR 50 A.D./ PAUL HAD COME TO CORINTH FROM ATHENS. AFTER A RELATIVELY LONG STAY OF 18 MONTHS HE LEFT AGAIN FOR EPHESUS: AND IT WAS FROM EPHESUS THAT HE WROTE THE FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS.

CORINTH WAS A VERY BUSY SEA PORT, THE STOPPING OFF PLACE FOR MANY OF THE MAJOR TRADE ROUTES. IT WAS NO DIFFERENT THAN SEA PORTS HAVE BEEN THROUGHOUT HISTORY. MEN FROM MANY DIFFERENT LANDS MADE UP ITS POPULATION,-TRANSIENTS, + SAILORS-ACCOMPANIED BY ALL THE POPULAR MEANS OF ENTERTAINMENT GEARED TO SUCH A CONSTITUENCY. IT'S BROTHELS AND FAMOUS TEMPLE OF APHRODITE, THE GODDESS OF LOVE, EARNED CORINTH THE NAME THE "FLESH POT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN."/ EVEN IN THIS ENVIRONMENT PAUL HAD ESTABLISHED A CHURCH,-A CHURCH THAT,- WE SEE FROM HIS LETTERS, WAS ONE OF HIS MOST BELOVED.

NO SOONER HAD HE LEFT CORINTH, HOWEVER, THAN HE HEARD REPORTS THAT TROUBLE WAS BREWING. THE GROUP OF CHRISTIANS HAD BROKEN UP INTO ARGUING FACTIONS. SOME SAID THEY BELONGED TO PAUL, OTHERS SAID PETER WAS THEIR LEADER AND STILL OTHERS PREFERRED. APOLLOS. BUT UNDERNEATH THIS PETTY STRIFE WAS A DEEPER PROBLEM, A PROBLEM THAT PAUL SAW AS ENDANGERING THE VERY SPIRIT OF THE GOSPEL./ THE CORINTHIANS HAD MISSED THE POINT, THEY HAD BECOME THE VICTIMS OF SELF DECEPTION. AMIDST THESE ARGUING FACTIONS HAD ARISEN A GROUP THAT CALLED THEMSELVES "SPIRITUALS." THEY SPOKE IN TONGUES, THEY

FELT THEMSELVES TO BE JUST A LITTLE SUPERIOR TO THE AVERAGE CHURCH MAN.

THEY HAD DECEIVED THEMSELVES INTO THINKING THEIR WISDOM, THEIR GIFTS OF INTELLIGENCE AND SPIRITUAL SENSITIVITY WOULD WIN THEM FAVOR IN THE EYES OF GOD. THEY REFUSED TO BE THEMSELVES,-THINKING THE PROUD VENEER OF SUPERIORITY THEY HAD CONSTRUCTED WAS MORE SUITABLE.

SO PAUL IS WIRTING TO THEM AND THEIR PROBLEM. HIS LETTER IS NOT DOCTRINAL, OR THEOLOGICAL AS IS ROMANS: IT IS PAUL IN A "REAL LIFE SITUATION." INVOLVING MEN, THEIR FEELINGS, THEIR PRIDE AND THEIR SIN.

(NOW MEN ARE MEN, AND PRIDE IS PRIDE AND SURE ENOUGH PROBLEMS ARE PROBLEMS, SO WE DO WELL TO OBSERVE HOW PAUL ADDRESSED THIS ISSUE. HE IS KIND AND GENTLE, BUT FIRM IN HIS ADVICE AND ADMONITION AND HIS WORDS APPLY AS MUCH TO US AS THEY DID TO THE CHRISTIANS IN CORINTH.

"DON'T KID YOURSELVES" HE TELLS THE OFFENDERS, "LET NO MAN BE DECEIVED," (BE YOURSELVES-HAVE THE COURAGE TO LOOK AT THE TRUTH.) PAUL POINTS HIS READERS TO REALITY - ONLY ASKING THAT THEY BE TRUTHFUL WITH THEMSELVES. HE DOES NOT SCORN THEIR WISDOM AND THEIR ABILITIES: IF THEY CARE TO BOAST ABOUT SPEAKING IN TONGUES HE REMINDS THEM THAT HE CAN DO IT BETTER THAN ANYONE OF THEM. BUT THESE ARE NOT REALLY THE THINGS

THAT COUNT THE MOST. WHAT IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE IS THAT THEY BE TRUTHFUL TO THEMSELVES, THEN ALL THINGS WILL BE THEIRS.

DECEPTION IS BAD BUT NOTHING IS WORSE THAN SELF DECEPTION. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ARTISTS, POETS, NOVELISTS AND PHILOSOPHERS HAVE TOLD US THAT MODERN MAN'S BIGGEST PROBLEM IS THAT HE LIVES IN A WORLD OF SELF DECEPTION. THIS HAS BECOME SO PREVELANT THAT IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR A MAN TO BE HONEST EVEN IF HE WANTS TO BE. MANKIND'S ILLNESS IS THAT WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF MAKE BELIEVE FROM WHICH WE CANNOT ESCAPE. IT IS A PLEASANT WORLD WE HAVE CREATED, EVERYTHING IS ROSEY AND NICE, BUT EVERY NOW AND THEN A CULTURAL REBEL STANDS UP AND SAYS THAT HE FINDS LIFE SICKENING, THAT HE CANNOT STAND THE CONSTANT FALSITY OF DAY TO DAY LIFE.

SUCH A PERSON IS THE HERO OF J.D. SALINGER'S NOVEL "CATCHER IN THE RYE," HOLDEN CAULFIELD. THE NOVEL WAS A HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL ONE, BANNED BY MANY HIGH SCHOOLS AND REQUIRED READING AT MANY OTHERS. HOLDEN CAULFIELD IS A BOY WHO WALKS OUT OF HIS PREP SCHOOL JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS BECAUSE HE IS FED UP WITH THE FALSITY OF THE PLACE. HE KNOWS WHEN PEOPLE SAY ("HOW ARE YOU HOLDEN?") THEY AREN'T REALLY CONCERNED WITH HIS WELFARE: HE KNOWS THAT WHEN HIS TEACHERS WISH HIM GOOD LUCK THEY DON'T REALLY MEAN IT: HE SEES BLARING LIES IN ALL OF LIFE AND THE WHOLE THING MAKES HIM SICK. THE ONLY PERSON HE KNOWS WHO IS GENUINE AND SINCERE IS HIS LITTLE SISTER PHOEBE AND THAT

IT IS TO HER HE GOES, JUST TO TALK./ MANY A TEACHER, PHILOSOPHER AND THEOLOGIAN HAS FOUND THE BOOK TO BE A BITING AND THOUGHT PROVOKING ANALYSIS OF THE WAY WE LIVE. — IT EXPOSES THE SELF DECEPTION THAT IS SO GREAT A PART OF US ALL.

PERHAPS THE MOST GLARING EXAMPLE OF DECEPTION IN OUR COMMON LIFE IS THE WORLD OF ADVERTISING. WE DON'T THINK ABOUT IT EVERY MUCH AND WE ARE READY TO STATE THAT WE REALLY DON'T TAKE THE ADS VERY SERIOUSLY,- BUT HERE IS WHOLESALE DECEPTION THAT WE ENCOUNTER EVERY MINUTE OF EVERY DAY,/ IT IS A WORLD OF WHICH WE CANNOT AVOID BEING A PART.

DOES ONE ACTUALLY FLOAT AWAY IN A CLOUD OF SPRING TIME FRESHNESS WITH ONE PUFF OF A SALEM?? DO ANY NEW AUTOMOBILES, NO MATTER HOW GOOD, LIVE UP TO THE CLAIMS MADE ABOUT THEM? DOES THIS HAIR RINSE REALLY MAKE YOU DEVASTATING OR THIS HAIR TONIC ATTRACT THE ATTENTION IT SHOULD?? BUT IT'S ALL AMUSING AND FUN WE SAY, WE DON'T REALLY TAKE IT SERIOUSLY. THE POINT IS , DAY AFTER DAY, MINUTES AFTER MINUTE WE ARE THE VICTIMS OF A BARRAGE OF EXAGGERATIONS AND LIES." LET NO MAN DECEIVE HIMSELF." SAYS PAUL

ON A LITTLE DEEPER LEVEL WE CAN SEE THE PROBLEM OF SELF DECEPTION IN OUR FUNERAL PRACTICES. GOING BACK TO OUR DISCUSSION OF GRIEF TWO WEEKS AGO WE SAW HOW THE BEREAVED PERSON IS FORCED, AND FORCES HIMSELF, INTO AVOIDING GRIEF./ HOLD IT BACK,-STAY INSIDE - - DO ANYTHING-BUT DON'T SHOW HOW YOU FEEL./ OUR TERMINOLOGY IN A DEATH SITUATION,

IS WELL MEANT, BUT CLEARLY REFLECTS THE DEPTH OF OUR DECEPTION. "SO AND SO HAS PASSED ON OR PASSED AWAY," WE TELL OURSELVES AND THE BEREAVED THAT THEIR LOVED ONE IS JUST SLEEPING: OR HE HAS CROSSED OVER TO THE OTHER SHORE. RARE IT IS THAT WE HEAR THE WORD DEAD: "SO AND SO DIED." IT TAKES COURAGE TO BE HONEST AND IN THE DEATH SITUATION WE DO ALL IN OUR POWER TO AVOID THE HARSH AND BLUNT TRUTH.

AS A NATION AMERICANS ARE NOTORIOUS FOR THEIR REFUSAL TO ACCEPT ANYTHING NEGATIVE; WE ALWAYS LOOK FOR THE ROSY SIDE, ~~WHERE~~ perhaps COMPLETELY IGNORING A TRUTH THAT IS STARING US IN THE FACE.

IN OUR DEALINGS WITH FIDEL CASTRO'S CUBA, OUR NATION HAS BEEN HINDERED BY THE NAIVE NOTION THAT PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD ADMIRE AND RESPECT AMERICA: THAT PEOPLE ENSLAVED BY A TYRANT WILL WELCOME DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM: THAT A WHOLE NATION WILL TURN ON ITS LEADER AS SOON AS OUTSIDE FORCE IS APPLIED. WE JUST CAN'T FACE THE TRUTH THAT MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ARE UNITED IN THEIR HATRED OF THOSE THINGS WE HOLD DEAR. THIS IS TRULY SELF DECEPTION.

OUR GOVERNMENTS AND WE AS A PEOPLE, HAVE ALWAYS FAILED TO CORRECTLY EVALUATE RUSSIAN COMMUNISM. DURING W.W. II AND IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARDS OUR DIPLOMATS AND EVEN PRESIDENTS CAME BACK FROM THE CONFERENCE TABLE WITH GLOWING REPORTS OF A NEW CHANGE IN COMMUNISM.

" "
THINGS WOULD BE DIFFERENT NOW. HARRY TRUMAN SAID STALIN WAS A MAN OF HIS WORD, THEY UNDERSTOOD EACH OTHER. / FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT CAME LOFTY STATEMENTS OF ETERNAL PEACE, FRIENDSHIP AND GOOD WILL BETWEEN THE TWO GREAT POWERS. - RUSSIA AND AMERICA HAD A COMMON DESTINY, NOTHING WOULD EVER CAUSE THEIR FREINDSHIP TO SUBSIDE. / ALL THIS BECAUSE WE WERE WILLING TO DECEIVE OURSELVES RATHER THAN FACE THE UGLY TRUTH.

TODAY OUR DIPLOMATS SIT AT THE TABLE WITH THE RUSSIANS AND CHINESE TO TALK PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE, OUR PRESIDENT PLANS TO TALK WITH KRUSHEV / AND ALL THE WHILE THE COMMUNISTS PLUCK AWAY IN S. E. ASIA, KILLING, PLUNDERING, ASSASINATING: / In the past year KILLING 3,000 GOV. OFFICIALS IN VIET NAM ALONE.

I POINT THESE THINGS OUT NOT TO LECTURE ON HISTORY OR PLITICS BUT TO DEMONSTRATE HOW DEEPLY WE ARE INFECTED WITH SELF DECEPTION, / HOW UNREALISTIC WE ACTUALLY ARE. WHEN WE PUSH OUR THOUGHTS JUST A LITTLE FURTHER IT IS CLEAR THAT THIS SELF DECEPTION IS A RELIGIOUS PROBLEM OF THE SAME NATURE AS THAT WHICH DISRUPTED THE COMMUNITY AT CORINTH.

PAUL CALLS US TO FACE THE TRUTH, TO BE OURSELVES AND NOTHING ELSE. HE TELLS US TO BE REALISTS, TO SEE THINGS, (ESPECIALLY OURSELVES,) AS THEY ARE AND NOT THROUGH ROSE TINTED ~~RSEOTCLES.~~ SPECTACLES.

IT TAKES COURAGE, THIS THING WE ARE TO DO. - TRUTH IS NOT ALWAYS PLEASANT, IT IS UNCOMPROMING AND BLUNT, AND ABOVE ALL ELSE IT IS HUMBLING. IT MEANS DISCARDING ALL

CRUTCHES, OUR WEALTH, OUR WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE, OUR ABILITIES THAT MAKE US SOMETHING SPECIAL. IT MEANS TEMPORARILY STANDING ALONE WITHOUT FAMILY AND FRIENDS, WITHOUT AUTOMOBILE AND BOOKS, WITHOUT VOCATION AND PREFERENCES. IF WE DO THIS THEN WE CAN SEE THE PERSON THAT IS REALLY US AND THIS IS THE ACT OF COURAGE. WE ARE SO ACCUSTOMED TO OURSELVES AS WE HAVE FASHIONED OURSELVES, WITH TASTES AND HABITS, HOME AND JOB, THAT IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO CUT EVERYTHING AWAY AND TO SEE THE CORE UNDERNEATH.

A MAN THAT HAS DONE THIS FINDS HIMSELF TERRIBLY ALONE, NAKED AND FRIGHTENED BEFORE A MEANINGLESS VOID. "TAKE ALL THIS AWAY AND THERE IS NOTHING LEFT." THIS IS THE MOMENT OF ROCK BOTTOM TRUTH THAT PAUL WAS PLEADING FOR.

THEN IT IS WHEN WE SEE HOW UTTERLY DEPENDENT WE ARE. - THEN IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT THE "GOOD THAT WE WOULD WE CANNOT". - WITHOUT OUR SELF-MADE CRUTCHES WE ARE A SORRY SIGHT INDEED. A PERSON WHO HAS HAD THE COURAGE TO GO THIS FAR HAS FULFILLED THE APOSTLE'S ADMONITION ("LET NO MAN DECEIVE HIMSELF.")

AT THE BRINK OF BLACKNESS, WITH NOTHING LEFT EXCEPT OUR OWN SELVES WE ARE READY TO LISTEN TO THE GOD WHO WAS IN CHRIST. IT IS THEN THAT THE THOUGHT OF A GOD WHO HAS CREATED US AND SUSTAINED US ALSO LOVES AND CARES FOR US HITS US LIKE A LIGHTENING BOLT. IT IS THEN THAT OUR EYES ARE OPENED AND OUR MINDS CLEARED AND WE COMPREHEND THAT LOVE IN THE FIGURE OF A CHRIST AND A CROSS.

AS WE ARE, DECEIVING OURSELVES WITH WISDOM, STATUS, WEALTH OR WHAT HAVE YOU, WE ARE QUITE SELF SUFFICIENT. WE DON'T NEED THAT GOD OR HIS LOVE, WE CAN MAKE IT ALRIGHT OURSELVES. -THIS IS THE EPITOME OF DECEIT AND THIS IS OUR ULTIMATE SIN.

BEING TRUTHFUL, IS THE ONLY WAY TO THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. IT IS ONLY A GOSPEL TO THOSE WHO HAVE THE COURAGE TO FACE THE TRUTH ABOUT THEMSELVES.

ALL THINGS CAN BE OURS IF WE ARE WILLING TO TAKE THIS STEP. ALONE, WE RECEIVE, ANEW, GOD'S LOVE, HIS GIFT OF LIFE**HAPPINESS.AND SORROW:-IN A NEW PERSPECTIVE WE SEE THOSE THINGS THAT WERE OUR CRUTCHES BEFORE. OUR WEALTH AND WISDOM, OUR MATERIAL POSSESSIONS, OUR LOVES AND FAMILIES: ALL THESE BECOME OURS AGAIN BY THE GRACE OF GOD- NO LONGER CRUTCHES BUT GIFTS OF LOVE. -

THIS WAS PAUL'S PLEA TO THE CORINTHIANS/DO NOTDEPEND ON YOUR WISDOM AS A CRUTCH, CAST IT ASIDE AND STAND ALONE FOR A WHILE. THEN YOU SEE GOD, LIFE AND YOURSELF IN THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE. THEN YOUR WISDOM BECOMES A GIFT TO BE USED AND ENJOYED.

TO FACE THE TRUTH TAKES COURAGE, A LOT OF COURAGE,- BUT THIS WE MUST DO.

Let no Man be Deceived

FOR ALL THINGS ARE YOURS, WHETHER PAUL OR APOLLOS, OR CEPHAS OR THE WORLD OR LIFE OF DEATH, OR THE PRESENT OR THE FUTURE, ALL ARE YOURS, IF YOU ARE CHRIST'S BECAUSE CHRIST IS GOD'S.